

Ad analysis brainstorm questions

If you need help starting an ad analysis, try answering some of the following questions. These questions are intended to generate ideas for the kinds of questions common to many ad analysis assignments. Always defer to your instructor's specific requirements first.

The product, service, or idea

The product, service, or idea must satisfy someone's needs or cater to someone's desires.

- What is the product or service?
- Why do people care about this product or service?
- Why should people care about it?

The sponsor and the medium

Ads are usually created by organizations, either for-profit or not-for-profit, and are intended to be distributed in particular ways, such as in print magazines, on websites, or on television or radio.

- Who is the ad's sponsor or parent company?
- Is there any reason we should trust this advertiser? Is there any reason we should mistrust this advertiser?
- Where does this ad appear? (For example, in a magazine [what kind], a newspaper [which one], on a billboard [where])
- When did this ad appear? (For example, the month, season, year, election cycle, other social context)
- Why did the sponsor place this ad in this medium?

Appearance and impressions

Advertisers make very deliberate choices in colors, images, styles of text, layout, and negative space.

- What colors are used? (For example, warm, cool, bright, soft)
- What fonts are used? (For instance, formal, informal, simple, decorative, large, small)
- What images are used? (People, animals, cars, natural settings, homes, offices, past, present, future)
- Which images or colors are in the foreground? In the background?
- How much do the images, colors, and fonts contribute to the message?
- How much do the images, colors, and fonts help attract the right audience?
- How much does the text (the words) contribute to the message?
- How much does the text help attract the right audience?
- What overall impression does the ad create? (For example, traditional, safe, modern, exciting, humorous, calm, sensual, sexy)

Cultural references

Cultural references can call up enduring religious or nationalistic ideas or short-lived pop-culture trends.

- What images or colors might be intended as cultural references? (For example, USA cultural references might include the color combination red, white, and blue; images of presidents or founders; images of eagles, the White House, or national memorials; images of national parks or unique scenery; happy nuclear families)
- What words might be intended as cultural references? (For example, USA cultural references might include words such as independent, American, freedom, united, revolution, home, community, or family)
- What words or images might suggest current trends in games, politics, sports, fashion, beauty, memes, TV shows, or music?

The audience

Ads are intended to appeal to as wide an audience as possible, but they are nevertheless targeted to a subset of the general population—whoever is most likely to want this product, service, or idea.

- Who is likely to be attracted to this ad?
- Who is likely to respond to this ad?
- Who seems to be the audience for this ad?
- Who is likely to benefit from this product or service?
- What are the probable characteristics of the ad's audience? (For example, income and education level, social status, gender, age, ethnic or religious group)
- When might someone overlook this ad?
- When might someone be put off or offended by this ad?
- How well does the ad target its intended audience?

The type of appeal

Ads can appeal to many human needs and wants, often several at once.

- What is the message of this ad?
- Where does this ad use logic (logos) as part of its appeal?
- Where does this ad use an appeal to sentiment (pathos)?
- Where does this ad use an appeal to right and wrong or credibility (ethos)?
- Where does this ad seem to be most convincing? Least convincing?
- Where does this ad seem to be humorous? Annoying? Realistic? Unrealistic?
- What is the response the advertiser desires?
- How is this ad effective or ineffective?
- Why does this ad matter?

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